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ABSTRACT

In response to a legislative request, this seminar convened to make a comprehensive study of ways to improve the governance effectiveness of the state's county boards of education and county school board members. Participants were county school board members, superintendents, principals, teachers, service personnel, parents, community leaders, and state legislators. They defined governance as "creating a vision that is future oriented by setting policies in accordance with the Constitution. Governance should be results driven, not means driven. School governance means providing an equal and excellent education for all children regardless of race, color, or creed." Recommendations for county school boards addressed the areas of functions, climate and change process, qualifications, education, and restructuring. The report includes excerpts from participants' journals which reflect their diverse opinions. Appended are: (1) select seminar discussion questions; (2) participants' hoped-for outcomes; (3) recommendations for county school boards; and (4) recommendations for the West Virginia Legislature, the State Board of Education, the State Department of Education, and Regional Educational Service Agencies. (KS)

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REPORT

on

"A Select Seminar for School Board Governance"

Convened at Canaan Valley Resort and Conference Center
Davis, West Virginia

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--A definition from seminar participants

Prepared by:

Patricia Penn
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Introduction

This is a report on "A Select Seminar for School Board Governance" held at a conference center in Davis, WV November 16-18, 1990. The report is largely descriptive of purpose and process, with preliminary findings from data collected in an interactive, interpersonal setting. Dr. John Carver of Carver Governance Design, Inc., will present to the Legislature in January 1991 a full report abridging this seminar and two other studies relating to county school board governance.

The Purpose

The Select Seminar for School Board Governance was convened in response to HCR 30 "requesting the Legislative Oversight Commission on Education Accountability to make a comprehensive study of ways in which to improve the governance effectiveness of the state's county boards of education and county school board members."

The purpose of the seminar was to encourage a select group of representatives from the West Virgina educational community to engage in structured conversation about the implications of, and the need to review in light of new legislation, governance of the state's schools. The structure enabled participants to share their rich knowledge, experiences and ideas with each other, to reflect individually on that sharing, write about it in journals, and to make available to the Legislature their collective work product.

The results, which are here called recommendations, were not reached through consensus and are not intended to be viewed as a voted group product, although most were reached through a group process. Indeed, the process is product to a significant extent, and some of the events of the session will be useful to participants in their ongoing efforts toward restructuring education.

The Process

The seminar was built on the principle that the participants are the experts. They were invited in approximately equal numbers of county school board members, superintendents, principals, teachers, service personnel, parents, community leaders and state legislators. Those who accepted received pre-conference readings to use in preparing for their participation. Although a consultant on school governance provided food for thought in a keynote address at the opening evening session, it was the ideas generated in small

groups that provided the meeting's content.

Eight questions were posed, not to be answered but to provoke discussion. The questions appear as Appendix 1. Pat Ceperley, Pat Krysinski, Sandra Orletsky, Pat Penn, and Helen Saunders facilitated five groups to consider the questions. They worked in two different configurations: first, with people in similar roles, later, with randomly formed mixed groups. At intervals, groups came together to share their considerations in plenary sessions.

Dr. Krysinski, an assistant professor of educational administration and supervision at Washington State University, provided the seminar's structure and coordinated the two-day session. Her proposed format suggested that roles be "checked at the door" to encourage consideration of ideas based strictly on their merit. However, some revisions necessitated that participant name tags include titles. Ideas were nonetheless treated as equally valuable in reporting recommendations.

The Data

Data were collected through journal writing and small and large group brainstorming sessions recorded on chart paper. Participants were also encouraged to write recommendations on index cards and submit them individually to facilitators. Data from the chart paper and index cards were later transferred to typewritten sheets, and journals were reviewed for recommendations that did not appear elsewhere.

(NOTE: Question 1 sought from participants what outcomes they wanted as a result of their work during the seminar. Responses were not treated with the other data, but are included as Appendix 2. The list could be labeled "concerns." Some of the items appear later, in slightly different form, as "recommendations.")

Recommendations were subsequently isolated into single items and tallied by frequencies. They were then grouped into general broad categories of similarity. Data that follow are reported by those categories under descriptive headings.

County School Boards

Functions

Nineteen recommendations were concerned with school boards' setting the mission, vision, goals, and policy of school districts. Three recommendations referred to "Evaluation,"

four referred to "Accountability," eight referred to "Intra-district leadership/management," eight to "Inter-district leadership/management," five to "Communication," 10 to "Decision Making," two to "Public Relations," and six to "Legislation."

Climate and Change Process

In addition to the "Functions of Local School Boards," 18 recommendations focused on school board climate, and 18 dealt with the change process. It should be noted that one of the discussion questions solicited responses about change; other findings emerged naturally.

Qualifications, Education and Restructuring

Six recommendations focused on "School Board Qualifications," seven on "Board Member Education," and seven on "Board Restructuring."

Appendix 3 outlines the frequency of recommendations in the function, climate, change process, qualifications, education and restructuring of County School Boards.

State Ancillary Groups

In addition to recommendations concerning local school boards, Select Seminar participants provided recommendations for state groups concerned with, and involved in, the educational process. Five recommendations were provided for the State Legislature. Four recommendations were directed to the State Board of Education, one to the State Department of Education, and five to the Regional Education Service Agencies.

Appendix 4 displays the recommendations for these groups.

Local Control

Select Seminar participants offered seven statements regarding local control. These comments included:

"more input at the local level"

"Allow more governance at the local level."

"Problems should be addressed locally."

"Ideal governance allows people to control their own destiny as much as possible."

"Decisions and authority should reside at the lowest level that the knowledge exists that influence those decisions."

"Evaluate and meet unique needs of children in their schools thru community decision making and communicating same through administration and local school boards."

One comment was simply "local control."

Other Comments

Certain comments, some from individuals and others from small groups, did not fall within categories. They follow:

Individuals/groups must accept responsibility for their decisions.

After school board members feel like they have all the information they need, local boards ? to RESA and use their authority to get the best utilization out of RESA.

LEA must have flexibility to tailor the rules and regulations to their own unique situations.

County administrators--Provide technical assistance to district schools.

Different kinds of people will start running for office [as compensation changes].

WVSBA should find a non-tax funding for dues.

A list of seminar participants and staff, a summary of participant evaluations, and a copy of the seminar agenda are appended to this report.

Observations

Implicit in the recommendations was a belief in--a commitment to--the concept of local school boards. This is not surprising, in light of their having been a part of school governance in the United States for about 200 years.

The data suggest, in fact, this this select group found local school boards in West Virginia to be basically healthy, but in need of toning up.

Recommendations for county boards were most numerous in the area of functions, especially policy setting. Closely related were those having to do with decisionmaking. Both of these sets have an underlying theme: a desire for openness, ethical behaviors, and constant awareness of children and their needs on the part of boards.

The second most numerous recommendations had to do with climate and change, further expanding the theme of a need for inclusion.

In short, the data say that **what** boards are doing is not out of line with educational needs. **How** boards go about their work is more often questioned. The recommendations may be addressed in part by some work with boards on influencing their climate and using public relations to gain public support.

Further insight can be gained from looking at the following reflections selected from participant journals.

Reflections from Journals of Select Seminar Participants

--"Teachers, parents and others interested in educaton will have more input in some schools than they have in the past as a result of recent legislation.... I am very pleased with the work that has been accomplished here.... We have achieved our purpose. We all learned from each other. School Boards will be better off because of our interaction this weekend."

--"There is no ideal way to govern public schools. The governing should be future oriented and the procedures should allow input from all groups in the decision-making process. Policies should be established so that this is an on-going process and does not promote controversy."

--"Politically not feasible to eliminate local school boards so we should decide how best to use them."

--"The School Boards Assoc. needs to develop a method of financial self-support (vs. tax dollar paid dues) so their rep. can take a more aggressive part when legislation on St. BOE policy is being discussed and voted upon. The present system forces silence because of a threat to dues being paid out of school bd. budget....School bd members need to understand the law or policy before they judge it. They should sit down with their legislator & have specific suggestions & not general negative uninformed reaction to something new."

--"Faculty Senates will become very powerful in the implementing of any facet that affects their particular schools. School Advisory Councils will allow for more public input. How about training of lay groups and teachers comprising the councils....Hooray for faculty senates and advisory councils."

--"Terms of office--Problems with 4-yr terms of county board members because many boards will be having 3 (the majority) of board members elected every other term or even every term possibly--We need the 6-yr terms for continuity in leadership and planning in our counties. Legislators terms should be 4 years instead of 2 for House of Delegate members and 6-yr terms instead of 4 yrs for State Senators. Need the breathing space between elections and especially advantageous for continuity of legislative process.

"If there was some way to get all county boards into WVSBA it would give us a broader outlook on education....Money is the main reason the few counties who don't join give. The press is very critical of money spent for joining the state

association and counties often back away from the adverse publicity."

--"As a board member I see the constantly changing laws as comparable to standing on shifting sand."

--"Board members must be willing to be trained & to keep abreast of current educational trends. If local bds are to continue to exist locally members must be more assertive/aggressive. . . .Possibly more pay or release time from work w/o loss of pay so that members can spend the additional time necessary to be informed and effective in the rapidly changing information/technology age.

"Last pm my brain felt fried--Sat was an intense, productive day--It's been a good conference--we did a lot in a little time. . . .If we had more time available we could have recapped--not necessarily prioritize, but pull out some items by consensus that we felt were of most consequence. It would be interesting to reconvene this group later & see if what we brought out has had any impact."

--"Boards have to learn to be more proactive. We have to learn to use the power we have. How can one or two board members act to influence fellow board members who are more interested in management than governance? Seems this problem of management vs. governance is one that is not just a problem of boards but one that infects whole system of government in West Virginia. Legislature has been involved in micromanagement of school systems for years & years. They make laws about minute details of school management & then state department has formulated massive procedures to inflict the law on schools. I hope recent legislation is a trend away from this mentality. . . .

"Many board members seem to be enamoured with the ideas of reinstatement of the six year term and higher educational standards for board members. I strongly disagree. We represent the public's interest in the education of the children in our communities; we need to be representative of our communities. . . .I do believe that if we look at the educational backgrounds of board members over the years, we would find that the public has been selecting board members with more extensive educational backgrounds than they did in the past.

"What we need to do is convince more people of more diverse backgrounds to run for the board. I believe the six year term discourages business people and busy involved people from running. We are ending up with more and more retired teachers and administrators, many of whom have axes to

grind. . . .I like to see a majority on a board be outsiders, otherwise we lose the community's interest in education and are left with those who have special interests."

--"My perception is the governor has in effect attempted to swing control of the state's education to a totalitarian type of one person control. Hopefully this change will cause more continuity of education, throughout the entire state."

--"I believe that the continued existence of local school boards is necessary for accountability to the local taxpayers who support schools. If boards are to survive, they also must be open to change. What change is necessary for boards to encompass so that children can be prepared for the 21st century hopefully will also be suggested. . . .

"Teachers will need to enlarge their perspective & be concerned not only about what happens in their own classroom--but how this affects the school as a whole, the county as a whole, the state as a whole.

"Administrators will need to learn to feel comfortable about shared decision-making--everyone from the board of education members to the superintendent, supervisors & principals.

"All participants will have to become better informed about the best research available concerning proven, effective measures in improving instruction. Working together, we can make a difference in education. . . .

"Evaluation of conference. Probably the most valuable thing which occurred has been the interaction between various interest groups that don't ordinarily have such an opportunity for interaction. . . .The identification of participants in the list given us should have been more consistent. I think it would have been helpful to list the names in such a way so that every participant's constituency was identified. But at least it should have been consistent--either everyone's or noone's!"

--"It is essential that all citizens take responsibility for the educational system. As a people we have sat back for too long. We have waited for 'someone else' to make decisions and then we have complained of lack of communication, lack of input and lack of understanding. This is not a scenario unique to our state; it is a national crisis. As a nation and a state we have poured our resources and time into materialistic acquisitions and we have turned over the truly important functions of parenting,

policy making to others. Democracy cannot survive without active participation. The future of our children and our nation requires that we take time to be involved in the efforts that shape our system."

--"It is unrealistic to expect citizen board members to be experts in areas such as finance and curriculum. It doesn't take an expert to determine vision, set goals and make policies. . . .[Reaction to ex officio representation] I personally would be reluctant to serve on a board where I have no vote.

"Keep needs of children in mind as society changes. Try to understand all the factors that are causing the changes. Keep vision and goals in mind but constantly evaluate them in relation to changing needs of children."

--"Considering the positions and baggage each of us brought to this conference (individual & constituent agendas), I think the conference was very useful and furthered understanding of the school board governance issue. The conference provided a lot of data, no conclusions, due to the format."

--"21st century or now? Should the educational system prepare for parents and children an advisory on the effect of television in the early years on the learning process which will be taking place as they go up through K-3. Point is--what are the TV impacts on discovery, excitement, class presentations. What impacts are now being felt by teachers (& the system) from TV watching. It is more related to ethics, morals, socialization than to learning facts or process.

--"State Board of Ed members should not be appointed by the Governor. They should be selected by a committee appointed by the Governor, made up of abut 15 persons from all parts of the education family including parents & students."

--"We [local board] must be the dreamers of the system. . . .Get all the red-tape out of the way of teaching. . . .Focus on the future and do not get bogged down with day-to-day operations. . . .We must be allowed to lead the school system at the local level."

--"After meetings 11-16-90 So many angry people, they feel they must portect something, what? Too many pat answers, statements made for effect. Best statement from reporting groups. Let's cut some crap. We need to do this from the State House to the school house."

--"Summary of Thoughts. Nothing will change in the W.Va. school system until the 'old' style of management is gone-forgotten. We still operate under a master-slave theory of management that has failed. I'm not sure I know what it should be replaced with, but I do favor site-based decision-making/management. The more power given to local schools, (providing the meet certain broad state goals) the better. Let us decide how best to meet the goals. Let's give the recent reforms a chance to work, train our Board members, demand that they get input, put local policies on review/comment before adoption, etc."

--"Changes frequently come in such rapid-fire order that sufficient time is not provided for transition activities. We have learned that, if we wait, everything will change again. Current changes revolve around shared decision making and more input at every level will be critical."

--"During the process of change many dynamics will appear. All parties must recognize these dynamics and work toward the refinement of each into a wheel in which all cogs are balanced. As a teacher I am willing to give what is needed to ensure the accomplishment of our goal."

--"We need a more commonly accepted vision of our school system as being one of the best in the world."

--"This has been an unusual meeting--in that each participant shows an interest in the educational process--but from many different aspects. How wonderful to air the concerns and find common ground for improvements. I would hope that the results of this meet's suggestions would be used constructively for an improved school system. . . .

"I am concerned about the role and lack of accountability of RESAs. I believe that more people should have knowledge of what they are doing and of their ultimate goal. Their meetings should be held at times when working people would be able to attend. Evenings--as are local BOE meetings."

--"There is little to learn from doing nothing. . . .When your image improves, your performance improves. . . .One reason many people never attempt new things is their fear of failure."

--"Thank you for the seminar. Perhaps history making. Outstanding interaction. The very least thing that will happen is I will be a better Board Member."

--"School Bds and their administrations must become proactive with change. We have a tendency toward

retrenchment or avoidance, thus complicating the problem. School bds must their meeting, media and influence to move the community toward positive change. Schools should make sincere efforts to involve parents and parent groups in the change process."

--"We need to put aside our prejudices related to past experiences with each other and work toward new solutions to old problems without placing blame for the problems. . . .I heard again and again that there is too much governance! People were polite about it but there are too many laws on the books and too many regulations to control small, nit-picky items. In this movement of empowerment, every level must be empowered to do their jobs. . . .It might be necessary to establish powers that cannot be usurped from the schools and the teachers. It will be very difficult, if not impossible, to make site-based management work effectively amid the myriad of existing laws."

APPENDIX 1
SELECT SEMINAR DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What do you hope to achieve as a result of your investing your time and effort in this select seminar?

2. As a result of the passage of reform legislation (Senate Bill 14, House Bill 2326, Senate Bill 1), what changes do you see in the governance of West Virginia public schools?

3. What is the role of each of the following [role groups] in ensuring that West Virginia public school students receive the highest quality education?

4. What do you see as the ideal way to govern public schools in West Virginia in order for all students to receive the highest quality education?

5. In their governance of public schools, how do you think school boards make decisions now? How should school boards make decisions?

6. Like other governing bodies, school boards are often faced with change? What do you think school board members--and school boards--need to do in order to govern effectively during periods of change or policy evolution?

7. What much school boards do to create conditions that foster change that will improve public schooling in West Virginia?

8. As we enter the 21st Century, what behaviors and functions, including possible new behaviors and functions, should we expect from school board members and school boards?

APPENDIX 2
Participant Hoped-For Outcomes

Question: What do you hope to achieve as a result of your investing your time and effort in this select seminar?

- Agreement on role and statement of mission of local boards and how other levels of government complement them.
- Develop strategies to strengthen local boards.
- To encourage local boards of education to develop professional hiring and promotion practices to eliminate nepotism and patronage.
- For the board of education and the community to understand the intent of education and goals of reform legislation.
- Help in how to implement legislative changes effectively
- How to achieve better education for students.
- Send message to legislature that in order to empower local school boards, they must be willing to give up some of their power.
- Understand role of local board members.
- Glimpse of what our role will be in the future.
- More clearly define the relationship of local school boards and state legislature.
- Continued mandated training for board members.
- To learn more about how schools boards do and should function.
- Clarify roles of board members and superintendents.
- Learn how to expand communications between various members of the school community.
- Find a way to open communications between administration, local school communities and boards.
- Identify strategies to help local boards do a good job with site-based management.

- Get ideas for areas of training--e.g., participatory management.
- To understand how individual board members make decisions.
- To impact the internal role of school boards.
- To see credibility of local boards restored and their authority to manage.
- To "pick the brains" of others
- Improve communication
- Learn what boards do and should do.
- Site-based management roles for everyone.
- Crap reduction program.
- Develop staff development strategies for implementing change.
- What does restructuring mean? How do the different entities feel?
- I want to assist in shaping the direction of governance of the school system. Desire to redefine goals.
- Help to create boards that are more responsive to the needs of children.
- How do school boards make the best of legislation to serve children and the system better?
- Set an agenda for progress for school boards. Help board members be leaders and advocates of new ideas.
- How do we really feel about site-based management?
- What is the role of the board in the change process?
- What will be the result of what we are doing?
- Desire to insure that decision-makers have necessary skills and expertise.
- Define role of school boards as they should be: to facilitate outstanding student achievement.

- Make recommendations for education improvement.
- Make boards more open to community.
- Help boards find their place and to promote public understanding of the constraints under which they operate, i.e., laws, interest group influences.
- Learn how changes in law will affect boards, i.e., levies, property re-evaluation.
- Equality and quality in education.
- Better informed school boards who take an active role.
- Understanding of multicultural needs of all children and commitment to educating all.
- Insight on changes with a voice in decision-making.
- Preserve local boards' control.
- Learn how changes can be made and implemented.
- Remove politics from local boards.
- Learn how new law affects boards; whether puff or substance
- Concern about how this group is being used--Is this conference a facade?

APPENDIX 3
COUNTY SCHOOL BOARDS

I. Functions of County School Boards

	Frequency
A. Policy Setting	**55 Total**
School boards should drive the system through mission, vision, goals and policy making.	11
1. Equity	
Adopt policies and procedures that will provide equity of educational opportunity for all students.	3
2. Curriculum and Instruction	
Focus on essentials.	1
Take advantage of technology.	1
Encourage and support creativity in classroom.	1
Include creative thinking and life-long learners in end product	1
Emphasize curriculum from site-based management.	1
B. Evaluation	
Evaluate goals periodically	1
Evaluate and study impact of policies/ changes on specific groups such as poor and minorities.	1
Evaluate goals.	1
C. Accountability	
Accept accountability with flexibility.	1
Be held accountable for educated kids.	1
Ensure accountability.	1
Be held accountable.	1
D. Intra-District Leadership/Management	
Delegate authority with commensurate responsibility.	1
Receive input from those closest to students.	1

Become facilitators, not managers.	1
Involve stakeholders in process.	1
Share authority and responsibility.	1
Board says what; superintendent implements.	1
Act like a legislature, not an administrator.	3

E. Inter-District Leadership/Management

Maintain on-going dialogue with constituencies in establishing policy.	1
Involve parents and constitutients.	3
Involve citizens in ad-hoc committees.	1
Break with tradition--e.g., partner with business.	1
Establish cross-county cooperation.	1
Do cross-county and cross-district planning.	1

F. Communication

Empathize with community; listen, find out what's going on, read and share information.	2
Establish open channels between various constituencies and the board.	1
Set up new vision for communication.	1
Be able to communicate reasons for change	1

G. Decision Making

Make flow of decisions student-oriented, child-centered.	3
Base decisions on mission, vision, goals and policy for good of the system.	3
Base decisions on information and give adequate consideration to implications of decision.	1
Let professionals make professional decisions and the public, public ones.	1
Use a variety of sources of information.	1
Be open-minded and synergistic in making decisions.	1

H. Public Relations

Use media to keep people informed; tell people the good news.	1
Be more visible.	1

I. **Legislation**

Know and interpret legislation locally.	1
Get updated periodically on legislative, judicial and policy changes in state-wide session.	1
Continue input of Boards in legislative process.	1
Be proactive with legislation and lobby.	2
Seek relief from [new] legislation to allow time to do what can be done.	1

II. **CLIMATE AND CHANGE PROCESS** **36 Total**

A. **Climate**

To create a climate that will foster the best possible education for all children, school boards should be:

willing to listen, flexible, and hold high expectations.	3
honest	1
willing to self-analyze	1
enthusiastic	1
accepting of new ideas	1
open/open-minded about change	2
willing to overcome fear of failure	1
willing to make tough decisions	1
able to welcome change as opportunity	1
willing and able to keep children in mind.	1
Local school boards should practice open government.	2
All proposed policies should be open to public comment.	2

B. **Change**

Learn more about change and how other boards deal with it; understand change.	5
Know what changes are from legislature and state board.	1
Get information from someone other than your own superintendent.	1
Study literature and identify strategies to achieve goals.	1
Train all parties in change.	3
Encourage communication with citizenry.	1
Set standards by which to judge achievement.	1

Involve everyone affected by change.	1
Manage change; assume it is needed.	1
Hold state and regional meetings for purpose of examining change.	1
Be aware that change change is a continuing process.	1
Go into schools and find out first-hand.	1

III. QUALIFICATIONS, EDUCATION, RESTRUCTURING — 19 Total

A. Board Member Qualifications

Be informed.	
Become specialist in areas--e.g., finance, curriculum.	2
Be able to read and understand financial statements; be sure budget reflects policy and values.	1
Be able to pick highest quality personnel.	1
Be literate, well read (national trends).	1

B. Board Member Education

Be trained in relations between Board and superintendent.	1
Invest in professional staff development.	1
Offer incentives for members to participate in training.	1
Provide more training for board members based on needs assessment.	3
Offer uniform training for school boards.	1

C. Board Restructuring

Establish advisory/consent/ex officio members for local boards.	4
Give thought to monthly meetings.	1
Establish six-year term for members.	2

APPENDIX 4
STATE ANCILLARY GROUPS

1. **Recommendations for the West Virginia Legislature**

   Determine what they're going to regulate & DO THAT and leave everything else alone!

   Provide flexibility by relaxing laws and regulations.

   Set broad statewide direction for education to provide adequate funding for thorough and efficient system of education.

   [Provide] empowerment to tax locally.

   The secretary of education [should be] communication liaison between executive and legislative branches.

2. **Recommendations for the State Board of Education**

   Support citizen mandate to have the State Board of Education run the schools; State Board takes active role; sets uniform system; holds county boards accountable.

   Establish policy and standards for quality education in WV.

   Develop systematic communication plan.

   County school boards should be an extension of State Board.

3. **Recommendation for the State Dept. of Education**

   Provide technical assistance to all 55 counties; enforce laws and State Board policy; standing (autonomous) commission for peer review and recommendation.

4. **Recommendations for RESAs**

   RESAs should be service only--not governance.

   Broaden representation on RESA Boards: teachers, business, parent, service personnel who would be non-voting.

   RESAs should be accountable to local boards who are the only voting members.

   Provide consolidated services where possible.

   [Be] accountable.